

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 06827905 2

Z/AB

Brooks

TO THE GRACE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,
IN MEMORY OF GOOD RECEIVED,
THIS VOLUME
IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR.



“Oh that men would praise the Lord
for his goodness, and for his wonderful
works to the children of men!

For he satisfieth the longing soul
and filleth the hungry soul with good-
ness.”

—*Psa. 107, 8-9.*



REV. FRANK L. BROOKS

PREVAILING PRAYER.

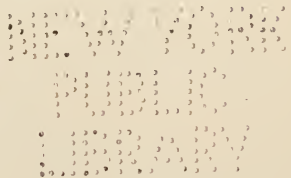
Sermons preached in the
Grace Methodist Episcopal Church
Taunton, Mass.

By the

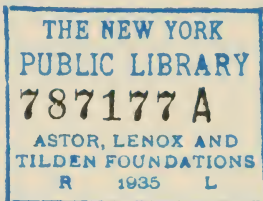
Rev. FRANK L. BROOKS
of the New England Southern Conference.

AUTHOR OF

“THE SURE FOUNDATION.”



[c 1909]
CB



Copyright, 1909,
By F. L. BROOKS

NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Printed by F. B. & F. P. Goss, Hyannis, Mass.

FOREWORD.

When a morning sermon of the author was ended, a friend said to him, "You are preaching these days out of your experience." This remark, coined in the sympathy of a christian heart, was the occasion of fruitful meditation. It led to the conclusion, that, if one does not in his preaching give out the results of truth in his experience, he is either a parrot echoing what someone else has said, or a mere theorist—a dreamer who does not have even the terraced hills, aglow with the setting sunlight, of Jacob's Bethel for a background of suggestion.

The following chapters are results of what the author believes to be truth working in his life experience. The thoughts are the flashing sparks from his own heart realizations. If they touch you at a point of need with helpfulness, he will have the joy which he craves, and which has been the inspiration of his toil. He may never know the result of the intended good ; but

"Sometime we'll understand,"

and the chords of harmony will vibrate with the unison note of good given and received.

THE AUTHOR.

TAUNTON, March 10, 1909.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. COMING TO GOD IN OUR NEED, . . .	9
II. THE WARRANT AND LIMITATION OF PREVAILING PRAYER	21
III. APPROVED SUBJECTS OF PRAYER, . . .	39



I.

COMING TO GOD IN OUR NEED.

“O thou, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer thyself hast trod;
Lord teach us how to pray.”

*“O thou that hearest prayer unto
thee shall all flesh come.”—Psa. 65, 2.*

“Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.”

These words we have just sung; but the poet goes on to say,

“Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath
The Christian’s native air,
His watchword at the gates of death;
He enters heaven with prayer.”

Prayer was a fact and a power of a rich blessedness in

the experience of both the poet and the Psalmist. They had each felt

“The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.”

And yet if they had been questioned, they could have given no better explanation of the why and how of prayer, than we can. For they would have been involved in the mystery that confronts the thoughtful mind—how God can intervene in the established order of nature and work results that shall be direct or indirect answers to prayer.

The student of nature finds in his investigations that everything about him has its being and performs its functions in accordance with law. The trees in the forests, the grass in the meadow, and the plants in the cultivated field, grow in accordance with law. The strata of the earth and the formation of the rocks—their very location in the field, are due to the operations of certain laws that are working toward definite ends. He finds that his own body grows, and his mind expands according to laws that are clearly defined and in a measure readily understood. These laws found everywhere are constant. Water always flows down, never up hill. The tree

with the peach life, bears peaches and never grapes. The falling stone is never erratic, suspending itself at some point in the descent, and then plunging for a distance with the swiftness of lightning, and then suddenly work its way to the earth with the speed of the ant. The law governing the falling stone is always the same. The heavenly bodies move with such unvarying precision that the astronomer can fix the time for the sun to set and rise, can calculate the passing of a comet, and the appearance of a star.

To this student of nature there can be, perhaps, no place for prayer in this established order of things. Or, if he do not deny the possibility of prevailing prayer, he may reach the conclusion that the only benefit of prayer is the reflex action on those who engage in it. But to the Psalmist prayer was a fact of experience, a power working results. His life had been replete with the blessedness of these results, and it was out of their fulness that he exclaimed, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

There is a mystery also, how God can respond to us when we just want to rest in his presence.

A boy came to his father's study, and finding him

busy, he lay down on the floor nearby and was quiet. The father observing the child's quietness, said,

"My boy, what do you want this bright morning?"

"Nothing," was the answer.

"Why then did you come to father's study?"

"Oh, papa, I just wanted *to be with you.*"

Yes, we can understand this soul feeling of the child.

There are hours when we, who are only children of a larger growth, with no formulated petition upon heart or lip, want to rest ourselves in the presence of God and to pillow the head upon the bosom of the Infinite. But how can God respond to this feeling of need and enable us to interpret the fact of his presence aside and apart from all other things?

The mystery of it all disappears when we consider the power of God and his relation to us. At least enough so that the element of impossibility is eliminated.

By the "thou" in the text, the Psalmist meant first the eternal God, who "in the beginning had made the heavens and the earth;" who laid in his

mightiness "the foundations of the earth," "commanded the morning" and "caused the dayspring to know his place;" who bound "the sweet influences of Pleiades" and loosed "the bands of Orion;" and who caused the "morning stars" to sing together.

To see the force of this fact, let us notice the influence of the human mind over created things.

A man of purpose goes to the hillside covered with giant trees. He knows that the operation of natural laws has made possible all this growth of trees; but he is not daunted nor dismayed. He knows that there are other laws to help him subdue the forest and "make the wilderness blossom as the rose." Iron cleaves the wood, gravitation brings the mighty giant of the forest to the earth, fire burns, dissolving the wood fiber into smoke that ascends to the fleeting cloud, and into ashes that fertilize the soil. Other laws help him, and the seed which he sows brings forth the thirty, sixty and hundred fold. The tree which he plants grows and yields to the pruning and the grafting and brings forth results that nature alone would never do.

Another takes matter, substances, and subject-

ing them to conditions makes steam power in the engine, electric power in the dynamo, gas light, electric light, the telegraph, telephone, and the X ray; and in all of this he has not created a new force nor increased the amount, but simply liberated or concentrated the forces of nature already existing. He has not destroyed a single law, but worked in harmony with it. And if man in his limited capacity can have such influence over nature, how much more can God do who is its creator?

Man can take two gases and combine them in certain proportion and cause an explosion and there will be drops of water as the result. This is probably a bungling way to create water; and God has his chemistry by which he floods the ocean's mighty deeps, fills the seas, the lakes, and causes the river to carry its current of blessing for man. And must we think, when Moses lifted his burdened heart to God in prayer, that it was impossible for God to cause the rock to cleave beneath the rod of his servant and to belch forth a stream of flowing waters?

Man sows his wheat, grinds the grain, bolts the flour and mixes it with a little yeast, milk and butter and gets his loaf of bread. And must we

think that it was impossible for God to bring together the necessary elements and have a loaf of bread, and fish broiling in the fire on the shore of the sea to satisfy the hunger of the returning fishermen, or that it was impossible for God to feed five thousand men with five barley loaves and two fishes when the Son of Man had given thanks?

If we can admit that God is, that he is imminent in nature and greater than the mechanism of the universe—if we place God in this mechanism which we call the earth and the world; and if we place him there, master of the mechanism and not mastered by it, then prayer and answers to prayer are possible. God, having created the contingency of prayer—of the human asking good of God, has provided for that contingency just as for the tiniest life organism, he has provided an adequate environment.

In my boyhood, father would go into the woods, in the season, fell the great hemlocks, score the bark at distances of four feet, and with the cleaver, peel off the bark; and in the winter, he would saw these trees into logs, twelve, sixteen and twenty-four feet lengths according to the straightness of

the tree. Sometimes he would drag the whole tree trunk into the yard and do the sawing as he had odd time for it. These logs, eighteen inches and some of them two feet in diameter, strewed around the yard, made a good play ground for cousin and me. One day, as we were at our play, I was hiding at the end of the log. As I lay there with my ear close to the log, I heard a sound as if some one were tapping. It attracted my attention and I began an investigation to discover the cause. I found that cousin was at the other end of the same log amusing himself by thumping his finger against the end of the log. I told him my discovery and went back to my end; and we telegraphed back and forth—the sound of that finger tapping was heard through a log twelve feet long. We were amazed. As I grew older, the telegraph was explained to me. This seemed wonderful to my understanding; but one day they told me that a man in Boston could speak in his natural tone of voice and be heard in Chicago. Then I was astonished. But now they are picking the symbols of man's thought from the universal ether surrounding our earth, as they are flashed across the ocean. Man is doing all

this; and must we think that man's thoughts, expressed or unexpressed, are not understood at the throne of the universe, and that the eternal God cannot find a way to respond? Nay, the person who listens at the end of the log, who inclines his heart unto God knows the truth, and can exclaim with the Psalmist, "O, thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

It is sometimes objected that the supposed answers to prayer are only coincidences. An infidel was passing the home of a neighbor and heard the humble cottager praying for his daily food. The infidel saw, as he thought, an opportunity for some fun. He procured a loaf of bread and tossed it in through the open window and waited, out of sight, for developments. He did not have to wait long. The humble cottager at once fell upon his knees and thanked God for the loaf of bread.

This was what the infidel was expecting, and he went into the house and began conversation with the old man.

"You have been praying this morning?"

"Yes."

"You asked God for bread?"

"Yes."

"Were you answered?"

"Yes."

"Where is the evidence?"

"Here it is. Do you believe me, this loaf of bread was thrown in the window?"

This was too funny, and the infidel burst into laughter, and said: "Neighbor, you are an old fool. I was your god and threw in the loaf of bread."

"But God sent it if the devil did bring it," responded the old man. And it was then the humble cottager's turn to laugh; but he had no desire to add to the discomfort of his neighbor, and he suppressed the elation of his triumph in the thought of God's goodness.

The old cottager was right, in fact. We read in the Book that God can make "the wrath of man to praise him."

A man is not beyond the power and control of God because he is wicked. Before leaving your home for the journey of the day, you pray for divine protection; and you are allying yourself with forces and opening channels of help that are, whether witnessed or not, your salvation. The ex-

periences, that may seem but coincidences to the unspiritual, are the results effected by heaven's inspiration through prayer.

Again the Psalmist bases the fact of prevailing prayer on the Fatherhood of God.

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

A father who has great wealth, commands the best wisdom of all ages to build a home and lay out the grounds which he purposes to give his son. He brings the best beauty of all lands to adorn both. The building is a mansion, grand in arrangement, superb in finish. The grounds in their layout, fragrant flowers and rich foliage of trees and shrubbery are an inspiration. There are servants and funds for its maintenance; and word is sent the son to come and take possession.

In coming, he sees the beauty of it all as Elysian fields of prophetic good. He breathes the sweet nectar as the atmosphere of Nirvanas in immortal blooming. But he pauses not with the flowers, shrubbery and trees. He hastens through it all and comes at last to the mansion. Here is splendor. Music greets him as the doors are thrown open to

bid him welcome to his estate. He goes with eager pace to the reception hall, into the library with its precious lore of literary wealth. The richness is almost priceless; but he tarries not here. He rushes through the vast hallways and along corridors with columns of costly carving, into every room. Why is the quest? Is it mere curiosity? Nay. He answers in a brief sentence. "Where is father?" They tell him, "Father is not here, father is dead." The boy bows the head, his eyes fill with tears, and he rushes forth. The mansion is nothing now. The grounds are of no value, and he leaves it all behind, while he goes to the mound in the cemetery and cries out in the anguish of soul, "O father, my father."

And God could not make this world so beautiful that the soul of man could be satisfied without consciousness of the divine presence. Not the universe, the things God has made, but God himself "satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness."

God has not made the heavens and the earth and flung them forth a dead mechanism. His presence is a pervading inspiration everywhere.

"They who seek the throne of grace
Find that throne in every place;
If we live a life of prayer,
God is present everywhere."

II.

THE WARRANT AND LIMITATION
OF PREVAILING PRAYER.

“O may these anxious hearts of ours
The lesson learn from birds and flowers,
And learn from self to cease,
Leave all things to our Father’s will,
And in his mercy trusting still,
Find in each trial peace!”

*“If ye abide in me, and my words
abide in you, ye shall ask what ye
will and it shall be done unto you.”*

—John 15, 7.

Hampton Court, London, has a famous vine. It is said to be more than one hundred and forty years old. In popular thought, the roots reach under the Thames river which is four hundred yards away. As a matter of fact they have been traced to a distance of twenty-five yards from the trunk. This

vine is very fruitful. It puts out every year three thousand bunches of grapes; but only twelve hundred are allowed to mature. This is indeed a venerable and wonderful vine. The noblest Vine, however, in the world is the one to which every Christian is attached as a branch. We may read about this Vine in those words, which Christ uttered to his disciples and which John treasured up for us, "I am the vine, ye are the branches, he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

This is the *true* Vine. Its roots reach back into the mystery of God's compassion for man; and its fruitage is in the consummation of man's eternal good. It challenges the world's dark night of un wisdom and spiritual death, by its fluorescent flowers of "peace and good will to men;" and makes the day time radiant with the achievements of "faith, hope and love." And prayer that is "The Christian's vital breath" has its warrant and limitation in the words of the Christ who said, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you."

It seems to be a natural propensity of the human

heart to desire to have its own way in life; and yet the earliest lesson that we have to learn is that we cannot have it. This was true not only when our childhood fancies led us in the path of disobedience; not only when our youthful ambitions led us into a course of wrong doing; not only when, in our maturity, we went into the field of sin to pluck the fruit of unrighteousness; but, when in the path of duty and in the sphere of legitimate attainment, we have found that limitations were set and we could not have our way. Again, in all that we acquire and achieve in life, we find that conditions are to be met.

If a man would have a fare of fish, he must meet conditions. What a boon for the fisherman it would be, if he could go down to the bank of the stream or to the shore of the sea and shovel up the fish, as the workman shovels gravel in the pit, instead of having to pick them out individually, as the fish are inclined to bite his baited hook!

If a man would have a harvest, he cannot get it by simply desiring it and going out to find the hill-side and valleys "white already unto the harvest." He must do much preparatory work. He must fell

the trees, dig out the stumps, haul away the stone, plow the soil, harrow in the seed, and wait the four months for the grain to grow and ripen its fruitage.

If one would cross the sea to some distant land, he must meet certain conditions. There are no fairy wings by which he can flit across the ocean's space. He must pack his trunk or hand-bag, go down to the wharf, buy his ticket, go aboard the steamship, subject himself to the rules, regulations and government of that ship. The ship's crew, by their shifts must stand day and night at their posts of duty while the passenger waits for days for the ship to plow through the seas and outride the storms. Effort, patience, "eternal vigilance" are the price paid for the successful voyage.

Marconi had the fact of the wireless telegraphy a long time before his discovery became a practical invention. The problem in the progress of the development of his discovery, was the problem of adaptation to the necessary conditions.

Thus wherever we go, whatever we do, we find ourselves confronted by a mysterious power and mode of operation which are absolute. Yet we do not consider this an irksome tyranny but rather our

delight and success. And, if it be right to meet conditions for a harvest or a sea-voyage, that we may have material good in this world, it is only fair to admit that spiritual good waits for conditions to be met; and is as certain when these are met, as any desired result in the natural world. Jesus said, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you," these are the conditions—"ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you."

This is a great promise, that if we meet two apparently simple conditions, we may ask what we *will*, not in hope, but in certainty of receiving the desired good; and I would have you hear it as from the lips of the Master, the Christ of God.

Some years ago, I was pastor of a church in a beautiful village on Cape Cod. The audience room had stained glass windows of beautiful pattern. The frescoing was rich and massive in color and in keeping with the costly windows. The front end of the church however had plain glass windows that did not show in the audience room. I learned through a friend that stained glass windows of the same quality and size as those in the audience room could be "bought," as it was said, "for a song." I

said, "I will sing the song." And I sang it to the tune of a hundred and twenty-five dollars. These windows were of the same width as the openings but not as high. The carpenter could build down to the sash; but this would change the church front and was not desirable. So I drew a plan for an art piece to be put in the opening over the sash and leave the finish boards and window cap as they had been in the past. The plan was accepted by the Trustees. To build these two art pieces would cost from fifty to seventy-five dollars, and I did not care to sing another song to this tune; and so proposed to the Trustees that they buy the lumber and let me make the pieces at odd jobs as I could spare the time. This was agreed and I started upon the work. One day when planing a board and throwing off the shavings there was an exhilaration in the movement and the action gave a buoyancy of body and I felt rested. And the thought came to me, how much easier it would be to work my nine hours a day and get my money at the week's end, than to do the work and bear the burdens incident to a minister's life.

Instantly there came to my mind, "and your bank

account would be gone." The sentence framed itself in just this way. I stopped to think what it meant. I had no standing bank account of dollars and cents. And I recalled the words of the Psalmist, "Trust in Jehovah and do good and verily thou shalt be fed." This had been my bank account in all these years of my ministry. I had drawn upon it in confidence and it had never failed me. And now to leave my life work and go out for the week's pay, my bank account would be gone, because of my lack of faith.

An undertaker, while we were waiting for a funeral service to begin, said to me, "I would not be a minister for four thousand dollars a year;" and I promptly answered, "Neither would I, but with my faith in God and love of the work, I can do it for seven hundred and fifty dollars a year," what I was getting at the time.

And he who is abiding in Christ in sincerity of purpose and surrender of will, is resting back upon principles that are as eternal as God is eternal and as beneficent as God is good.

One theory makes prayer only a dumb-bell exercise. We may strike out with these, downward,

in front, sideways and upwards; but we do not expect to do any execution with them. We would not attempt to fight our battles nor make hay with them. All we expect them to do is the reflex action on the body in building up muscle and giving tone to the nerve centers. So they tell us that prayer does not change God in his purposes toward us, and the only benefit derived from it is the reflex action upon ourselves. If so, then thank God for the reflex action. The praying heart finds blessedness.

But this theory does not meet the Scripture idea of prayer. Our Bible plainly teaches that God has conditioned certain things upon the fact of man asking of him the desired good. Ezekiel, the prophet, told the people of Israel that God purposed to sprinkle water upon them in the baptism of regeneration, to cleanse them from their idols, to give them a new heart, to put a new spirit within them, to cause them to walk in his statutes, "to multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field" until the land that was desolate should "become like the garden of Eden;" but, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

The skeptical logician would hang us up between the horns of a dilemma. He states his proposition in this way. Either God intervenes in the established order of the universe or he does not. No one can question this statement. God must do one or the other. But the skeptic goes on to say, if God intervenes and is all-wise and good as he is represented, then prayer is unnecessary for God knows our need and is moving toward us in his benevolence, and will supply our need whether or not we ask. If God does not intervene then prayer is useless since it can have no power to change the result of the working of the order established in the universe. If good or ill is coming our way it must come however we pray or do not pray. This is sufficient for the skeptic.

In answer to this sophistry, we are ready to admit that God has made great world forces, and that these forces or modes of the divine procedure are constant. The scientist is charmed, and rightly so, when contemplating these forces. He becomes enthusiastic when speaking of the properties of matter, and of the laws that make the lily of the field, clothing it with a beauty surpassing the glory

of Solomon, that pour tons of water over the cataract, breaking it into spray to be filled with the colors of the rainbow, and that hold the planets to their orbits and poise the stars while they sing their creation song. We can understand his enthusiasm. And this constancy, this majestic, orderly movement of the universe which charms him gives us assurance, and encourages effort. We are willing to go out upon the sea, and "do business in great waters" because we believe that the water anywhere and at any time will have its buoyancy, and that the winds will have their carrying power. And what we claim is that *prayer is one of these world forces*. Results are reached in prayer because God has ordained that they should follow the act or condition of praying.

Franklin flew his kite toward the storm riven clouds and holding his knuckle to the key suspended to the kite string, got the electric spark and knew that the lightning's power was but the intensified form of the mysterious power that he knew in the laboratory. So man conscious of some need lifts his soul Godward in prayer, gets the response and knows the truth of prevailing prayer.

Another theory of prayer goes to the opposite extreme—"The prayer of faith." The proposition of this theory is to the effect that if we have any desired good and we pray for it believing at the time we pray that it will be granted, we shall receive it; and if we fail to get the desired good, it is because we failed to have the specific faith needed.

Many considerations can be urged against this theory, but the chief objection is that it causes God to abdicate his throne in man's favor and involves self contradiction. On the basis of this theory, the sovereign will of the universe is not God's but man's; and God is reduced to the position of a servant to go about to satisfy man's will.

In the days gone by a Presiding Elder who exercised a fatherly care over the young ministers, was holding a Camp Meeting where a number of young ministers were in attendance. There was also, in attendance, a young lady of accomplishments, noble in character and devoted in her Christian service.

One day as the meetings progressed one of these young men approached the Elder and said he wished to have a private talk. They entered into

conversation and the young man unburdened the secrets of his heart. He had prayed over the matter and he believed that it was God's will that he should marry Sarah Ann, this sweet graced young lady. The Elder was in sympathy and told him that he would consider the matter and give his decision later.

It was not long before another young man approached him in the same way. This complicated matters a little, but the Elder gave the same answer; and before he chose to give his decision to any, five young men had approached him on the same matter of marrying Sarah Ann; and each one of them believed that his prayer was to be answered. He called them all together and told them the situation and said to them that there was something wrong in their theory of prayer and that they had better singly consult Sarah Ann and let her answer the prayer that seemed most agreeable to her.

But between these two opposing theories stands the Christ with the words of the text, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." This leaves no place for vagaries nor fanaticism of any sort. The conditions are definite, clear and sufficient.

First, "Abide in me."

The vine *clings* to the trellis, to the tree or to the wall over which it clammers. The branch *abides* in the vine; and therefore has the same life principle as the vine from which its power of fruitage is derived. Thus Paul wrote to the Galatian church, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God." That is, the life that he was living was a reproduction of the life of Christ—a branch abiding in the vine. There is no place here for iniquity in the heart. As the Psalmist said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

In this unity with Christ, there can be no wavering in our loyalty to God. As James the Apostle expressed it, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."

The second condition of prevailing prayer is that Christ's words abide in us. These words set the

bounds to our will; and we are to be governed by what his words teach in regard to our duty, privilege and hopes.

We are to have no will outside of his words. These words also define sufficiently the scope and range of prayer, and make prayer a sane, conscious and prevailing attitude of the heart toward its God.

Christ did not teach the disciples how to take the lame man by the hand and lift him to soundness of physical health. He left this and many other things to the ingenuity of man; but he did teach them how to pray.

*“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name*

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

*Give us this day our daily bread
- And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen.”*

This prayer is unique, a coin with a heavenly die. It is comprehensive and defines the scope and range of effectual prayer. Let us notice some of

the words of Christ concerning prayer that are to "abide" in us who pray.

"But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy father which is in secret." The closet for both Abraham and Jacob was the rock-built altar of Bethel. The closet for the prophets was the open field or the banks of some Chebar where to the longing eager soul, the heavens were opened and visions of God were seen. The closet for David was the housetop. The closet for Christ was the solitude of mountains. And the closet for you and for me is that place when we have need, and where we turn from the vain, delusive supports of the world, to be with God and him only. Here the "door" is "shut" and we are alone with our need and God who is the Father of mercies and the author of every good unto the children of men. If the lilies of the field which neither toil nor spin are clothed; and if the sparrows that neither sow nor gather into barns, are fed; then surely God will respond to the need of his people who can bear his image and consciously and with intention worship at his throne. How little is human faith!

Another word which Christ has spoken and which is to abide in us when we pray, is that we forgive men their trespasses. See Math. 6, 14-15.

A Superintendent of a Sunday school would kneel before the school and pray loudly, and close with the Lord's prayer, saying "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" and then meeting his pastor in the church vestibule would refuse to take the hand offered to him in Christian fellowship. His prayer got a few feet above the ceiling for he had a *loud* voice; but no further. Such prayers are like the vain repetitions of the heathen who fail to purify the heart.

Again, another word of Christ is that we have the spirit of willing surrender to the will of God in the unfolding good or ill of God's providence—"thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." To prevail in prayer we must be in the attitude to God when we can say, without a groan, "thy will be done." God's will is in the shadow and in the sunshine of life and God's will is best anywhere, and we are to recognize its beneficent supremacy.

Yet again, a word of Christ which is to abide in us, is "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father *in*

my name, he shall give it you." Our need is to be presented to the Father in the name of Jesus.

In time of the war, a judge, who did much for the soldiers, had an important case in court and he decided to put all other matters aside until that case was ended. One day as he was busy at his desk, a man entered his office. A glance told the story of want, and he was about to say to the stranger, "I have no time for this matter," when he observed that his visitor was pushing an envelope toward him bearing address in his son's hand-writing. His own son was at the front in the army, and seeing the hand-writing of his boy, he forgot the urgency of his business and laid aside his papers, and broke the seal and read, "Dear father: The bearer has come home to die. Help him for Charlie's sake." And that father arose, took time to take the one who had asked in the name of his son, by the hand, and led him to his home, and put him in Charlie's room, and caused him to be tenderly cared for as he had need. Is God's love less tender and powerful?

"He ever lives above,
For me to intercede;
His all-redeeming love,
His precious blood to plead;

His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

The Father hears him pray,
His dear anointed One;
He cannot turn away
The presence of his Son;
His spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God."

III.

APPROVED SUBJECTS OF PRAYER.

“Lord lead us to the mountain’s height;
To prayer’s transfiguring glow;
And clothe us with the Spirit’s might
For grander work below.”

*“But as for me, my prayer is unto
thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time;
O God, in the multitude of thy mercy
hear me in the truth of thy salvation.”*
—Psa. 69, 13.

Some years ago when the X-Ray was a new thing and there was curiosity on the part of everyone, I was in Boston; and, as I was going up Tremont Street, I noticed a sign which said, “Exhibition of the X-Ray, fifteen cents.” I had to count my pennies in those days, as now, but it did not take me long to decide that I would spend fifteen of them to see an exhibition of the “X-Ray.” I went in, paid my admission fee, and met the man

in charge. He was a gentleman of courteous manner and entered with zest upon the task of explaining to me what was known of the wonderful discovery. He told me how he was taking electricity from the live wire in the street.

Using technical terms that I did not understand, he told me that the current went through some transformer, and was brought by a wire to a tube in which he said the ray was developed or became manifest. This tube was of glass. It was simple in construction. The mechanism of it was also simple but effective, as he alleged, to make the ray manifest when the current should be turned on. This he did; but I could see nothing different from what had been. Neither could I feel nor hear anything of this ray. And I said, "Friend how do you know that there is any new and wonderful ray here when you can see nothing, feel nothing and hear nothing?"

He explained that I must go into the dark booth that was arranged nearby—some two feet from the tube. And after I had been in there a moment or two and my eyes had become accustomed to the situation, I would see a faint glow on the screen

that had been prepared for the purpose and of peculiar composition. True to his word, the fluorescence appeared on the screen. To make sure that there was no deception, I put my arm through an opening for the purpose and held my hand against the screen which was opaque to ordinary light, and to my amazement, I saw the dim outline of my hand, and the shadow of every bone in it, with light streaks through all the joints, showing that there was some mysterious light there, to which my flesh, the cartilage of the joints, and the muscles were translucent; but the bones were opaque.

Now I might have argued all the afternoon with the man that the fact of the unknown ray was impossible; but the fluorescence was its evidence. No ordinary light could produce the results. So when man prays, lifts his soul Godward and there is the fluorescence, the light of assurance and hope, he knows that God has heard and has answered. Thus in the text, we have a declaration of this conviction and a prayer. The Psalmist says, "As for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Jehovah, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy, hear me in the truth of thy salvation."

He was feeling the glow of the divine response upon the secret tablet of his heart; for he was not offering prayer to some image in wood, stone nor yet of gold, but to the Lord God of hosts who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to Moses on the plateau of Horeb where the bush, filled with flame of fire was not burned; who had appeared to the people of Israel, leading them from bondage by the pillar of cloud that was a column of darkness by day and of fire by night, and who had spoken to them from the midst of the solemnities of Mt. Sinai. And he prays that the Lord God, in the multitude of his mercy, would hear him in "the truth of his salvation."

The Apostle James said, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Such a prayer is one that meets the conditions of John 15, 7, "If ye abide in me and my *words* abide in you," and that is offered in sincerity of heart, in the help of the spirit, and in the name of the Christ of God. Such a prayer avails much, as the marching host of God's redeemed can testify.

There are many needs—approved subjects of prayer that fall, as the author of our text indicates,

within the truth of God's salvation. Let us notice some of these truths, or approved subjects of prayer.

We may come to God for mercy.

We read back in the book of Chronicles, "If my people shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

In Isaiah's prophecy we find the proclamation of gospel truth, "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." These are all gracious words.

The Psalmist was a man of authority. He had wealth, and honors of the world; but with all his temporal good in life, he did wrong, sinned against God and before men. He felt himself like a man in the mire and clay of a pit of horrible noises. These horrible noises were the echoes of a smiting conscience; and he tells us that he inclined unto God, and that God heard his prayer, brought him up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay and

set his feet upon a rock and established his goings, and put a new song in his mouth even praise unto God.

Saul of Tarsus was a man of learning and of strong convictions. When the claim of Jesus as the Messiah was advocated, Saul of Tarsus said, he is an impostor, and flung his energies into the fight to crush the faith among the people. His enthusiasm in the persecution of the Christians carried him to the point of consenting to murder. But one day he sees the truth in Christ. Jesus was in the power of his resurrection, the Messiah of God; and he became conscious of his sin. Later in "the street which is called Straight," and "in the house of Judas," he prayed unto God, who from heaven heard his prayer and gave blessed forgiveness. Writing of this happy day to Timothy, he declares himself to have been a "blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious;" "but I obtained *mercy*," he says, "because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

A man in a New York prison serving sentence for a crime, was visited by an old comrade. This

friend came not as a criminal, but to pray and talk of the new life which he had found. Jerry McAuley listened and wondered. He knew that Bill, his friend, was no hypocrite—he meant what he said and was what he claimed to be, a changed man. When Jerry went to his cell he took down the Bible and began to read—he wanted to know what that power was that had changed Bill. Later a Christian worker came and talked, read the Scripture and prayed. That night he was overwhelmed with his sense of sin, and he flung himself upon the stone floor of the prison in an agony of grief. In the silent watches of the night, he felt a gentle touch and heard a voice saying, “Thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee.” O, what a blessed hour that was for Jerry McAuley! He began at once to praise God until the keeper was aroused and came to his cell thinking him insane; but Jerry was never more sane in his life. His soul free from sin had found satisfaction in God. He always believed that a real presence was with him that night; and he went out of the prison to take up the work of the McAuley Mission in New York city.

A man in Willard Hall, Chicago, arose in a noon

meeting and said: "I have been twice around the globe, I have squandered two princely fortunes, I have broken my mother's heart; and I feel that I am a lost man. You people that pray, tell me, can Jesus help me and ease me of this load?" He submitted to be taught as a little child the way of truth and life; and when he prayed, he found God nigh unto him.

The man who curses, who is vile in habits and does wicked deeds is a sinner. The people generally recognize the fact and class him as a sinner. The man who, with polished manners and gloved hand, takes advantage of his neighbor is also a sinner; and the man who knows to do good and does it not, is likewise a sinner and needs the grace of God. If this man, any man will turn from his wicked ways and pray, God will hear and show him mercy.

Another truth in the salvation of God is sanctifying grace, and we may pray for it in perfect confidence.

Some plant in your window garden has claimed your attention and admiration; you have watched with interest, as it has grown the stalk, branches,

and bud, and has opened the fragrant flower. You have said, it is the *life* of the plant to be all this beauty in itself—to take from the soil, from the water, from the air and from the sunshine, the power to put fibre in stalk and leaf, to put pigments of green and brown in the calyx, and of pink and white in the petals. You rejoiced in the victory of the plant when the flower bloomed.

Thus we read in God's book, "We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." There are then good works which have been ordained for us and in which it is possible for us to walk, and not limp and stumble.

As we read the gospel narratives of Christ's compassion on the people, there is noticeably a marked connection between outward and inward bestowments. If he healed the sick, it was to draw attention to the moral diseases of men and to offer himself as the great physician. If he fed the hungry, it was to speak of their spiritual need and to present himself as the bread sent from heaven. If he opened the eyes of the blind, it was that he might clear the inner vision and throw light upon

a dark soul. Thus he taught the disciples that the supreme office of prayer is to obtain the divinest of all God's bestowments, the gift of the Holy Spirit. "If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that *ask him?*" O, let us believe that "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

A Christian woman, we call her such for she wanted to be one, and *tried* to be one, had an irritable temper. When vexing conditions were with her she would fly into a passion of ill-temper, saying things and doing things that were her grief after the spasm was over. She felt that it was unbecoming a follower of Jesus, the Christ. She prayed in a general way about it, but there was no victory. She would fall to-day and grieve to-morrow. Things went on this way some time until she was attending a ladies' prayer-meeting. Here she confessed her weakness and asked them to help her.

They told her to pray definitely and believe that God was *with her* for victory. She prayed and arose feeling a new power. She rejoiced in its

possession and started home. It was here that she met most of her vexations. She prayed that she might retain the power; and as she opened the door, the first thing that met her gaze was the housemaid carrying a pail down the front stairway, which she had been forbidden ever to do. The maid, in her fright from meeting her mistress unexpectedly, missed her footing on the step and slid to the bottom, spilling the contents of the pail on the hall floor. This was exasperating in the extreme. At other times she would have lost her temper in a moment and made a wild scene. But instead of this, she prayed, "Jesus help me," and putting off her wraps met the situation as the emergency demanded. When it was all over, she said to the maid, "Mary you forgot this time, but you wont do it again, will you?" And friend, it is possible to live in that closeness of fellowship with God, that we will have victory over "besetting sin."

We may come to God for the healing of our bodies. James says, "The prayer of faith shall heal the sick." It has done so in the past. It can do it now, and may do it again; but prayer is not, as some theorists make it, a whip lash to compel

God to the task of healing our maladies of body. Rather, prayer is the confident committal of our case to the tender mercy of God, the Father of mercies, waiting submissively the unfolding of his will in the healing, or in the bestowment of "grace sufficient" unto the day.

When Garfield was shot by the assassin, a call for a day of prayer for the President's recovery, was sent throughout the country. Business ceased its din in the public marts, in the store and in the manufactory. Schools omitted the recitations. I shall never forget how the Principal of our school in Castine, Me., called school to order, spoke a few moments upon the tragedy, read Scripture and prayed, and dismissed the school. That day the aspiring politician and the artisan bowed the head and paused for prayer to be offered. The strong hearted veteran of the war, standing in uniform, bared his head, his eyes filling with tears, while prayers were said. The prayers that day were fervent, sincere and from honest hearts; but Garfield died.

A minister in company with others was in attendance at a convention in session at the time.

They were praying for Garfield, and this man suddenly arose from his knees and exclaimed, "You need not pray any more, I have the witness, Garfield will live," but Garfield died. This man's belief was not faith but presumption. He had forgotten, as many do, one of the words of Jesus, "Thy will be done in *earth* as it is in heaven."

Soon after becoming pastor of a church in a New England city, a case of illness was reported to me with the request to visit the man at once.

This man's wife was a devoted member of the church; but he had lived a moral life, ignoring all other claims of God upon his life. His illness was serious. He had virtually been given up by the physicians. I called on him one day with the purpose of talking with him definitely about dying, which I did. I was so certain that he would die, that I told him that, if he would surrender to God for mercy and find pardon, I would set aside a rule of the church, and give him at once the "right hand of fellowship" without the usual probation period. After I left he went back to his bed, and said to his wife, "I shall never get off again until the undertaker takes me." He gave up all hope of living, as

friends had done already. On the following Sunday members of the church went there with me to hear his decision and have the church service. He was so weak that he could respond to our question by a motion of the head only. He could not speak aloud. We prayed and I noticed that all of them prayed in substance that, if it were God's will he might get well; but if not, to prepare him for death. Now none of them were coached to pray for his recovery. It was the idea of all that he must die. The result was that within three weeks' time that man walked a half mile with me in the streets of the city. This was all plain in my faith and philosophy of the religious life. If the man had not surrendered he would have died; but he surrendered and God gave him a lease of life as he did to Hezekiah the king.

A Christian worker who was an advocate of divine healing, said to me, "If I should fall and sprain my ankle, I would not bathe it nor call the doctor, I would pray for God to heal me." In answer, I said, "If I should sprain my ankle, I would put on some liniment that would stimulate action in the blood vessels and in nerve centers, and *pray* and I would get well as quickly as you."

It does not dishonor God to use means with our praying. God uses them all the time. He does not build a tree in a moment and without means. If the branch of the tree be broken, and the parts are put together with splints and wax to keep out the air and wet, God can heal the branch. Otherwise he cannot do it. If a leg is broken and the splints and bandage are put on, God can heal the broken bone; but if the parts are not held together, God cannot heal the broken bone. This is not a limitation of God's power, but a statement of the mode of the divine procedure.

It is not a dishonorable profession to search for antidotes for disease, to find out remedies and the application of principles, that will be helpful in the recovery of normal conditions in these disease-tortured bodies. Medical science has found many of these. "New thought," Christian Science, Psychic Therapeutics have found some; but the man who prays opens into his being channels for energies of the divine good that no other can have.

"The healing of the seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch him in life's throng and press
And we are whole again."

Once more we may come to God for spiritual good to others. Prayer has been through all the ages a blessed instrument of spiritual good. Moses prayed for the people. Christ prayed for the Disciples and for those who might believe on him through their word; and for Peter that his faith might not fail. And today thousands can testify to the beneficent good in prayer on the behalf of others.

A Theological student, in a Sunday school, had a class of young ladies. He prayed definitely for the conversion of each one. He followed up his praying with interviews when personal religion was pressed home to the conscience. One after another yielded and came into the fellowship of the church.

One of them was obdurate and would not yield. When his studies were completed, he went away to a distant city as pastor of a church. He did not lose however his interest and he continued to pray for this one member of his class that had not come to God. Some years afterwards he came to New York for a service. At the close of his sermon he found a lady standing at the foot of the pulpit steps. As he came down, she said, "Do you remember

Harriet J. —?" Of course he did, for he had been praying for her salvation all those years. And he said, "Harriet do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?" And, to his great joy, she replied, "Yes, I trust I do." Thus his prayers had been heard and answered graciously.

In days before the government patrol of the dykes in Holland, a little boy noticed a break. The water was coursing through. The storm was raging and the sea was breaking its force against the dyke that was giving way at the place of the stream. The lad knew the danger of delay. He put a sod in the stream, and called for help but there was no one to hear. He worked with all his might carrying earth to the broken place; but all that he could do, was to prevent enlargement of the break. And all that God had that night between the homes and fields of the people and the power of the deluging waters, was the hand of the boy. You in your place, humble or honored, may be all that God has to bear light and to be the inspiration of good to others. Be faithful and bear the handful of earth through the toilsome night of duty; and in the

breaking dawn of eternity you will know the beauty and power of your deed.

“As for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of thy mercy, hear me in the truth of thy salvation.”

